1. Introduction: reflecting upon the development of participatory action research and community development efforts

*Randy Stoecker and Adrienne Falcón*

This collection is a first-of-its-kind attempt to carefully consider the possibilities and challenges of strategically integrating participatory action research (PAR) and community development (CD).¹ It’s not that people haven’t been connecting the two in practice for a very long time. But they by and large have not documented how to connect them and where the overlap can enrich the practices of each and point to the transformative nature of both.

To begin, we first need to define how we are using the two terms. We use *participatory action research* as a generic term for all research that is guided by and generates knowledge for use by civil society organizations for local community projects or groups of individuals who have come together to improve their communities. We are well aware that there are many different labels for this practice (Chandler and Torbert, 2003) including, most commonly, community-based participatory research, community-based research, action research, participatory research, and popular education. We choose PAR because it explicitly names the three important components of the practice – participation, action, and research. *Participation* refers to the principle that a civil society group or organization has power to guide and use a research process and an action process. It does not refer to token “advising” and it especially does not refer to people “participating” in any researcher-defined study. *Action* refers to the principle that the group is involved in some kind of community development process that the research is designed to support in a tangible and meaningful way. And *research* refers to any process of knowledge development that a group engages in that directly supports the action. This can be formal research, such as natural science research studying air or water quality, or social science research studying people, organizations, communities, or societies. It can also be information collection to support groups telling their own stories in prose or visual art.

We use *community development* as an inclusive term for projects led by community members that focus on the physical, cultural, environmental, and social development of rural and urban place-based communities. This term has been used for widely varying practices that include everything from massive-scale developments wholly controlled by governments, corporations, and international funders to tiny little grass-roots social change efforts. By using the term “community,” we are excluding projects that are imposed upon place-based communities by outsiders. Even given that more restrictive definition, however, we will see that there is much to discuss in both the theory and practice of CD. Much like taking apart the key ideas behind each of the terms in participatory action research, analyzing the terms *community* and *development* separately provides a fuller understanding of their implications. The term “community” is used unreflectively for so many different collections of people that it has become meaningless. For our purposes, *community* refers to a face-to-face collective of people who interact through multiple intersecting roles to support each other and who sustain
those interactions over time (Stoecker, 2016). The most obvious manifestations of this form of community are the rural village or the urban neighborhood, but there are many others. In such communities, people interact with each other as parents, workers, worshippers, consumers, volunteers, and many other roles. This distinguishes the community from single-interest associations. The face-to-face characteristic distinguishes the community from online networks whose members may provide significant support to each other but, because of their geographic dispersal, cannot engage collectively in place-based development. The temporal characteristic “over time” distinguishes the community from the temporary gathering.

Likewise, we limit the term development to the process of the community engaged in guiding its own improvement, as community members define such improvement. We acknowledge that the term development can have a problematic understanding based in a linear form with expected outcomes that highlight valuing global north capitalist ideals. We challenge that Euro-centric notion of development and instead offer to reclaim the word for processes of growth led by and for communities of individuals and their organizations. Our understanding of development does not exclude the involvement of outsiders or government, but it does mean that community members lead the process. And improvement can refer to physical, social, or cultural changes. Thus, community organizing that reconnects community members and allows them to have more societal power as a group is included in this definition.

Why bring these two models/practices together? We see great synergy between them. As societies across the globe become more complex, community development must deal with many consequent complexities – funding, negotiations with various levels of government and with funders, relations with non-governmental organizations, knowledge of new techniques and strategies, and understanding of many other contextual factors that affect the success of any community development effort. All of these things require forms of research, involving information, knowledge, and skills. This can involve anything from trying to recognize that there is even a problem, to understanding current conditions, informing community development priorities, choosing the best community development option for a given condition, or evaluating the success of the chosen option (Stoecker, 2013). Indeed, sometimes the community development project can itself be a research project, such as a community history project (Twells, 2008).

We now have a large literature on the many forms of PAR, though the practice has only recently generated its own journal, Action Research, and the publications have taken an increasingly higher education standpoint. Additionally, the more recent literature has pushed aside some of the early global south literature and focused on the research process, not how it is connected to producing actual community outcomes. The emphasis has been on the relationships between researchers and community members, and the process of carrying out research projects (Beran and Lubin, 2012; Sandy and Holland, 2006). We are lacking good models of how to choose what research to do, and how to design research so it is directly tied to effective community change strategy. In sum, PAR lacks a community development framework.

Likewise, there is an enormous literature on community development extending well back in history, with its own journals like The Community Development Journal or Community Development. That literature has run the gamut from the process of bringing people together to do actual development projects to deepening theoretical analysis of social and political contexts. But it has not, except in passing, attended deeply to the role of knowledge development in those projects. That may be because there is often little formal research done as part of the project itself, though community development practitioners may draw upon past research to
inform their projects (Stoecker, 2013). So when we look, for example, at collections purporting to discuss the intersection, such as Mayo et al. (2013) we see a concentration of papers on evaluating projects, or reflecting on their group process, rather than discussions of how research was used strategically in the conduct of the community development itself.

These two practices of PAR and CD seem wholly complementary of each other, and each seems quite lacking without the other. To fully understand both their complementarity and their individual insufficiency, we must look closely at each, recognizing the key role that power plays in both. Each seeks to offer new forms of power and knowledge to the participants, and thus challenge the existing social structural power system. Consequently, both the form and the content of these two approaches face significant obstacles to operating in ways that could be truly transformative.

We also recognize that both practices too often take a “global north” standpoint rather than fully include the insights and experiences of those doing engaged research and community development in the wide variety of cultures around the globe. Therefore, this handbook is intentionally international, including chapters from Latin America, Africa, and Asia, as well as North America and Europe. We also solicited chapters from people at a range of places in their career trajectories, and even in different careers (especially activists and academics), so that we could incorporate people who are in the thick of doing and discovering their practice as well as individuals with decades of experience to bridge not only cultural and national boundaries, but also generational differences and the practice–theory divide.

Along with seeking to include a multiplicity of voices, we have engaged ourselves as editors with the authors in a participatory process to edit and learn from each other. Each of the chapters was reviewed not only by the editors but also by other authors to enable a community of researchers/activists to learn from each other and produce a shared endeavor. The core of our commitment is to work in a way that engages with others in a respectful way so as to learn, grow, and be transformed through processes of engaging with PAR and CD in a global way.

We developed this project in this way because of our commitment as academics and practitioners. Each of us comes from a background of combining PAR and CD. We offer both of our stories here as a way to make visible our standpoints as editors.

ADRIENNE’S STORY

My first job out of college in 1990 was doing a version of PAR. I worked for the Urban Coalition of the Twin Cities doing research with communities of color in ways that would empower them to do their own research projects in the future. The first project involved doing research with community members about the hopes, dreams, and life experiences of undocumented and newly legalized immigrants in order to inform policy decisions at the state capitol. While we incorporated community members as researchers with us, and the report was used to protect food access for immigrants during the time of welfare reform, the project was not sustained nor did it lead to long-term community change. Nevertheless, a few of the leaders from that time are still active in their causes today. At the time, I knew that my work was inspired by Paulo Freire and others, but I did not have all the language that has since developed and which, to be truthful, must also be unpacked to understand how these terms are used to describe practices by individuals seeking to bring about community change.
In 1998, when I was doing participant observation research in graduate school, I was employed as a community organizer on the North Side of Chicago. Working with a group of teenagers, we created a group, YPMC, Young People Making a Change, so that they could have an organizational context for doing the work that was important to them on issues of police brutality. They knew that they and their friends were being affected negatively by their interactions with police. They shared stories among themselves about the “bad cops.” I was new at organizing, but already in my fourth year of graduate school. I knew that if we wanted to convince others, we needed to move beyond individual stories or rumors.

During the summer after their sophomore year, six members of YPMC and I worked together on an organizing research and strategy project to try to raise awareness of the conflicts occurring between police and young people. We gathered data on youth and police interactions so that we could share findings, publicize issues, and provide evidence for making changes in the police system. Together with two youth interns, Billy and Yolanda, we designed a survey and spread it through their high school and diverse immigrant neighborhood to learn about their peers’ experiences.

After we had gathered over 200 surveys, they entered the data and did some simple analysis of experiences. What we found was that, although there were some examples of clear-cut abuse – one of the members of the club experienced a police officer pulling down his pants “so I can see how big he is” said one cop to another – the majority of the abuse was not as extreme. It was in the daily small mistreatments that the breakdown was taking place. As one young person explained it, “when you are on the hood of a cop car in the summer, it gets hot.” We also learned that some police officers were covering their badge numbers so that you could not report them.

We used our data to help us try to make a case to the Chicago Police Chief to try to force them to give business cards to police officers so we could track down who the “bad apples” were and to change how the Office of Professional Standards (OPS) – the reporting group within the police force for police brutality complaints – operated. We organized a community-wide meeting with the chief and OPS representatives. At this meeting, attended by over 300 people from all walks of life, young people and others who were recognized as community leaders shared the stories and experiences from their lives and the data in order to raise awareness of the conflicts on the streets. We asked the police department to provide business cards to officers so that we could find out who would and would not give out their cards and use that to identify who was mistreating young people. While in the end we did not win on our “asks” to the Police Chief, we did change awareness in the neighborhood. The young people who participated went on to organize more activities in their high school and community, engaging in community development in their neighborhood as they sought to make it safer for all.

In many ways, this project was a more successful version of PAR. The project from the start was owned by young people who were being affected by the police brutality. They created the survey, gathered the data, analyzed it, and shared it at a large community meeting. Through this collaboration, they built a group of friends that is still connected. They went on to work on other projects, challenging standardized tests in the Chicago Public Schools, and the youth police work has continued in the community. Therefore, this project stands as a much finer example of CD and PAR and yet still could be critiqued for not bringing about systemic change.

In 2020, I returned to this work, doing a survey in rural Minnesota where I now live with and through a local League of Women Voters committee with a group of young people and...
older adults, working intergenerationally in order to understand current interactions between
young people and police. Recognizing the impact that this work has had on me and the par-
ticipants over the years, including the Latino community leaders researching immigrants and
the young people in Chicago who are still connected, raises questions about how this kind of
approach impacts people’s lives over the long haul.

Through this work one encounters challenges, and figures out when and how to persist. As
a community organizer, I have learned the importance of building shared knowledge through
PAR, strategizing to bring about community change; and through it all sharing ideas with
a community of peers. That is what Randy and I have done in pulling together this book with
our fellow authors, to try and learn from each other about how to keep improving not only the
practices of PAR and CD, but also to address the ongoing social structural inequalities.

RANDY’S STORY

I first became aware of a PAR-style practice in graduate school in 1985, but in a very differ-
ent way from Adrienne. I was just completing a class assignment when a community activist
called me out. I was taking a qualitative research methods class, and the assignment was
to do an in-depth interview with someone. At the time I was living in the Cedar-Riverside
neighborhood in Minneapolis, and all around me there was sawing and hammering as old
run-down houses were getting rehabbed. Wondering what was happening, I found out there
was a neighborhood organization involved, and I set out to interview someone there. When
I got to the organization’s office, however, the person I asked to interview told me about how
he was regularly bothered by students who wanted to do similar interviews, but none of those
students so much as gave him a copy of anything they wrote from those interviews. He made
me promise that I would be the exception, after which he politely answered my neophyte gradu-
ate student questions. When I came back a week or so later, obsessed with a still somewhat
amorphous guilt about what I represented, I felt compelled to ask him if there was anything
else I could do. Tim Mungavan pointed to a door in the corner of his office, beyond which
was a short hallway. He explained that was the fire exit, but between his door and the outside
door was a pile of stuff in the way and the fire marshal was leaning on him. With a twinkle in
his eye, he asked if I could clean it all up. Feeling both guilt-ridden and intimidated I could
only meekly nod yes. What I found between those doors were neighborhood newspapers and
documents of all sorts that told the story of a neighborhood destined to be wiped off the map
by a government-funded developer, but which organized and then created one of the strongest
alternative housing development programs in the country. By the time I finished cleaning up
that hallway, I realized I had found my dissertation, and began a relationship with the neigh-
borhood that continues to this day, more than three decades later.

If Tim Mungavan and the residents of Cedar-Riverside turned me from traditional extrac-
tive and exploitive academic research, it was Dave Beckwith and the residents of Toledo, Ohio
who taught me how to be truly useful. When I started my career at the University of Toledo as
a young assistant professor, Dave asked me to lunch, where he presented to me a whole page
of research projects. I negotiated my way down to one – a resources and needs assessment of
Toledo’s struggling neighborhood-based development organizations. The goal was to under-
stand what they were and were not accomplishing in terms of neighborhood development, and
what they needed to do better. We had a small team of folks from the neighborhood groups guiding the research, but I was charged with the actual labor.

I went from neighborhood to neighborhood interviewing the directors of these tiny community-based development organizations and looking through their records. And because Dave, who was known as a highly skilled community organizer with an unchallenged reputation in Toledo, led the effort, I got all the information I wanted. But the story was horribly depressing. I had arrived in Toledo after having written about an amazingly successful neighborhood, and now was tasked with writing what looked like failure. Still, I dutifully put together my report, which Dave promptly sent off to the printer, after declaring “I know exactly what we’ll do!” A few weeks later, I and my report were the keynote at an all-day city-wide neighborhood development meeting. After I recited the depressing findings, Dave sent all the government officials and funders into one room and all the neighborhood groups to another room to talk about what they wanted from the other group and what they were willing to do for it. Miraculously (so I thought, but Dave had prepped a few people in each room in advance, like a good organizer), both groups agreed that funding had to be dramatically increased, and that the neighborhood groups had to significantly ramp up their skills and capacity. Out of this formed the Working Group on Neighborhoods (WGN), which then commissioned my next research project – a study of foundation philanthropy in Toledo. In some ways it was another depressing project, showing just how little funding went to community development. But Dave once again reached into his community organizer toolbox and a couple of years later that report helped WGN leverage $2 million to support capacity building and other support for the neighborhood groups. A few years after that you could drive down the streets of those neighborhoods and see new and rehabbed housing.

So I learned my PAR practice directly from a community development context. And it gave me a model that I have continued to learn more about and feel like I am becoming more successful at. More recently I have been figuring out how to do this by involving students. I have been able to go beyond using communities to train students and instead have been able to learn how students can dramatically expand my own research capacity. As a consequence, I have seen community groups put our research to work for environmental improvements, a new community center, and reduced local discrimination against Hip Hop artists.

But I have not seen a lot of work like mine being done through higher education institutions and I’ve consequently always felt like a Martian in academic meetings about all this “scholarship of engagement” stuff. So my goal for this volume is to have a discussion I can’t find elsewhere – how to integrate PAR and CD to achieve the kinds of outcomes I have witnessed.

BACKGROUND ON PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

One way to think about the history of PAR is to recognize that it has origins in both the global south and global north and that the two origin stories are very different in ways that reflect their understandings of power and resistance and the role of information in maintaining the current system versus challenging it.
History

The documented practice of PAR began later in the global south than in the north, but is worth beginning with because its influence in the north seems to have been greater. It may also be that additional documents on its origins in the global south are harder to encounter and as such merit future additional excavation. In the east, Rajesh Tandon in India and Muhammad Anisur Rahmin in Bangladesh have been leaders in the literature and the conversations about the practice. In the west, the practice has been made most visible by Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal in Brazil and Orlando Fals Borda in Colombia.

All of these practitioners emphasized a kind of knowledge mobilization that sometimes used formal research procedures but also commonly drew on people’s experiential knowledge to inform organizing and action against various oppressive social conditions being imposed on the people. Action drove the desire for information and research that could lead to social change.

Paulo Freire (1970) in particular became famous for the practice of popular education and conscientization – a process of facilitating people to engage in a participatory education process that starts from their own experience. The phrase pedagogy of the oppressed that titled one of his books (Freire, 1970) was adapted by Augusto Boal (1979) to what he called theatre of the oppressed. Rajesh Tandon’s (Brown and Tandon, 1983) work, which he labeled participatory research, involved more formal research processes, but focused on grass-roots people developing knowledge to fight oppression. Fals-Borda (1991) used the phrase participatory action research. Similarly to Tandon, he emphasized more formal research, and set up principles for the co-construction of knowledge with grass-roots people. Rahman may have been the strongest advocate for people leading not just their own research processes (1991) but also their own community development (1993).

In the global south from the beginning, then, the vision for PAR was liberatory and even revolutionary. The purpose was to change structural conditions of oppression, and the practice lived the goals. If the people were to be liberated, they could not be led by the privileged. All of these practitioners believed that the people themselves must lead. And while they believed that the people must lead in an educated and informed way, they were wise in realizing that such education could not be imposed on them but that even the education process must be led by the people.

In the global north there was a distinct lack of revolutionary goals in the official version of the history of PAR. Kurt Lewin (1946, 1948) is perhaps the most notable and cited historical influence. His practice of action research focused on engaging people across structural divides – workers and managers, and people from structurally unequal racial groups. In Lewin’s process the researcher was a central figure, often leading both the research process and the action process with the goal of improving production, very much in line with maintaining structural hierarchies. In working across structural divides, Lewin can be seen as operating in a conflict resolution mode without a willingness to directly confront structural power differentials.

Lewin’s approach, as well as the action research label, has been picked up most prominently in the field of education (Kemmis, 1960; Sherman et al., 2004). And in sociology, William Foote Whyte’s (1990) work, which he labeled participatory action research, expressed very much a Lewinian process.
Of course, not all work in the global north has been researcher-led and oriented to conflict resolution. Indeed if one extracts an alternative history, there is a long-standing tradition of other community-engaged research projects primarily led by women and people of color. Going back to the early twentieth century, one of the more participatory-oriented research projects was Hull House maps and papers (Residents of Hull House, 2007). This project, led primarily by residents of the famous settlement house in Chicago at the close of the nineteenth century, remains a role model for community-based ethnography.

Another overlooked tradition, especially in academia, is the work of Myles Horton, through the Highlander Folk School in Appalachia. He drew on some of the practices of Hull House but also the Danish folk schools. Horton’s work, consequently, looked much more like Paulo Freire than Kurt Lewin. Highlander’s process was very much popular education – bringing together people experiencing a common issue to tell their own stories about the issue and devise their own strategies for dealing with it (Horton and Freire, 1990). The organization was central to the founding and growth of the racially integrated Congress of Industrial Organizations and to the Civil Rights Movement.

When John Gaventa took over the directorship of Highlander, he added an explicit participatory research approach, most famously with the Appalachian Land Ownership study (Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, 1983) that exposed the oppressive influence of mining in the region. Gaventa, a sociologist, also brought a theoretical perspective to the work that emphasized the importance of structural power relationships in the research itself and in the role of the research in social change efforts (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). Indeed, his work on knowledge and power informs this text in many ways, recognizing that knowledge is a form of power and that even the definition of what is considered knowledge, data, and information is in and of itself an act of power.

**Contemporary Practice**

The global south and global north veins of practice have remained in PAR. David Brown and Rajesh Tandon (1983) were the first to contrast the approaches, referring to them by their original labels, *action research* and *participatory research*. They were followed by Stoecker (2003a), who added more theoretical framing to their differences. In basic terms, the Lewinian model is comfortable having the researcher lead the research process, and follows a functionalist theory of change. In functionalism, the important standard for the good society is that all its members are socially sorted into appropriate roles and that the system remains stable. Conflict is seen as a symptom of an unhealthy society and groups challenging the system are seen as expressing deviance. Within these theoretical frameworks, Lewinian-style action research is designed more to maintain system stability through minor, gradual adjustments that may involve only token demobilizing participation by oppressed groups (Arnstein, 1969).

The global south model in contrast puts much greater emphasis on the empowerment and liberation of oppressed people, following a conflict theory of change. In conflict theory, superficial stability is not an indicator of a healthy society when there are inequalities in access to the resources and amenities of that society. Open conflict, in such societies, is a positive development as it indicates the potential for progressive change (Morrow, 1978; Eitzen et al., 2012; Downes and Rock, 2011). Participatory research is designed to support the organization and mobilization of oppressed groups pressing for dramatic changes in the social system.
The youth participatory action research (YPAR) efforts from the 1990s to today stand in sharp contrast to much of the more mainstream work in the United States (U.S.). In these efforts, young people are invited to study their communities and processes which affect them in order to bring about change. These efforts are often linked to community organizing and honoring the wisdom of diverse young people. This is in part why we have one section of the book dedicated to models adopting this approach.2

But in general, we can’t tell today what model a practitioner is following by the label they use. Indeed, even going decades back we see “participatory action research” being used by both the more conflict-oriented Fals Borda and the functionalist-oriented Whyte. Stringer’s (2014) “action research” looks more like Tandon’s “participatory research.” The labels are simply not helpful for more than perhaps orienting the discipline of the practitioner. The term “action research” still tends to be used more in education, “community-based participatory research” in public health, and “community-based research” in the liberal arts. But within each label the variations in actual practice are so wide that there is more variation within than between.

The challenge facing PAR, beyond the diversity of practice, is figuring out how to enhance the action component. Practitioners have focused much more on the “P” and the “R” than the “A.” Public health has made some strides in connecting the action component (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2008) but hasn’t built robust theoretical how-to models. And thus the gap between PAR and CD remains unfilled.

BACKGROUND ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CD, on the global stage, has been a comprehensive practice that includes both social and physical forms of development. Since its inception it has been a contested term. The practice of CD, of course, dates back to the beginning of collective action by people to improve their existence. But the professionalization of the practice has been more recent.

History

In both the global north and south people have long-standing traditions that could be understood as CD. From barn raisings in the U.S. to mingas in the Andes mountains where indigenous people would come together to accomplish community projects, people have always worked together to improve communities. While barn raisings are rare now in the U.S., the practice of mingas continues in Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. In Quito, for example, people came together in low-income neighborhoods in the 1980s to build childcare centers for the community in response to family needs.

Two starting points for professional community development in the global north would be the settlement movement in the United Kingdom and Cooperative Extension in the U.S. In 1884 Toynbee Hall (Till, 2013) was the first in a wave of settlement houses that would sweep Britain and the U.S. Established in buildings located in marginalized neighborhoods, settlement houses brought together college-educated professors, students, and recent graduates to provide services and build on the existing cultures of their host communities. Settlement house staff often lived on the premises, thus often building strong relationships with residents (Matthews and Kimmis, 2001; Davis, 1984). Looking back on the settlement house movement
in the U.S. we can also see its colonizing tendencies, as those institutions often acted out the pressures on them to assimilate immigrants (Mieras, 2008).

At about the same time, a practice known in England as “university extension” focused on bringing university research to farmers. This practice was formalized in the U.S. through a variety of legislative acts establishing the land grant university system (McDowell, 2001) and then Cooperative Extension in 1914 that expanded university engagement with communities from agriculture to home economics and community development more generally (Rasmussen, 1989; Somersan, 1997). And while the land grant system attempted to integrate the knowledge mission of higher education with community development, it must be noted that the “land grants” that funded such universities came from the sale of land stolen from indigenous people (Lee and Ahtone, 2020), fundamentally contradicting its purpose.

British and U.S. governments and professional practitioners then spread the practice globally where it became further entangled with colonization. The principles of empowering local communities to develop themselves became confused with imposing Western development models on them. As the global north practices of community development spread across the global south they began clashing with community development practices already emerging in the global south. Among the most important alternatives to the colonizing development models in the early twentieth century was the Swaraj movement promoted by Gandhi (1909) which focused on developing communities of local self-reliance, against imposed statist authority and especially colonial authority. In practice that meant organizing and developing the skills and knowledge of local community residents to do the work required for self-development.

The post-World War II era saw the waning of statist colonization, as many colonized nations regained at least their political independence. But neocolonial forms of development persisted, as global north standards of development persisted among nations whose global corporations benefited from continued resource extraction and whose development funding schemes imposed western standards of consumption on newly legally independent nations (Willis, 2011). But because this historical moment saw a new need for community development as newly independent nations, and other war-ravaged nations, worked to rebuild their societies, neocolonialism exposed contradictions and created space for challenges. Significantly, by 1955 the United Nations chose to define community development as “a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress of the whole community, with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance on the community’s initiative” (United Nations, 1955: 6).

But the shift in rhetoric to such participatory development is not free of contradiction. Mallence Bart-Williams from Sierra-Leone notes “It’s quite evident that the aid is in fact not coming from the West to Africa, but from Africa to the Western world. The Western world depends on Africa in every possible way, since alternative resources are scarce out here … While one hand gives under the flashing lights of cameras, the other takes, in the shadows” (Pangambam, 2018).

**Contemporary Models**

How can we understand contemporary community development? There are so many varied practices in so many parts of the world. One starting point is to follow Boothroyd and Davis’ (1993) distinction between three forms of what they call “community economic development.” They use the acronym with a carefully structured creativity, asking what the practice looks like...
when it emphasizes the economic (cEd), the development (ceD), or the community (Ced). In
their analysis, cEd looks most like the capital-intensive colonizing development projects that
allow little community input and prop up existing power relations. Its focus is on economic
growth, without regard to externalities. Moving to ceD, the emphasis can still be economic,
but the process is more rooted in the locale, focusing on local resources and processes for
a more customized intervention that takes into account the quality of development. It is in Ced
that alternatives blossom, as the focus is on community-led processes that build the bonds of
community itself and can work much further outside of the box.

Another way to distinguish the practices is through a two-dimensional model that focuses
on the degree of social change on one axis and the degree of constituency control on the other
(Beckwith, 1997). Community organizing has high constituency control and a high social
change focus. Forms of community-led physical community development have high constitu-
ency control but low social change focus. Advocacy has a high social change focus but low
constituency control. Advocacy, as defined in this model, does focus on systems change, but
the advocate is usually a professional who is again separate from the constituency. Finally,
traditional social services have low constituency control and a low social change focus. In the
U.S., social services are typically developed by professionals who are separated from the con-
stituencies they serve, and such service professionals focus on filling the gaps in the existing
system rather than changing it.

Community organizing and physical community development stand in contrast from
advocacy and social services in that they both attempt to be driven by their constituencies in
terms of what issues they take on and what strategies they use. The theoretical and practical
distinction is that physical community development works within the system and its existing
rules to create jobs, housing, and other community amenities, while community organizing
emphasizes changing the system rules, often so that community members can engage in forms
of community development that leads to better jobs, housing, and other community amenities
(Callahan et al., 1999).

Global North Community Development

The CD box, then, in the U.S., is quite specialized. It has even led to a specific form of
organization called a community development corporation (CDC). CDCs were formed partly
as a response to a massive wave of community organizing in the 1970s, and could even be
portrayed as attempts by elites to dilute community organizing into more acceptable forms of
community work that didn’t challenge the existing system (Siriani and Friedland, 2001). As
the model became popular especially in the U.S. urban “rustbelt” stretching from the Midwest
to the northeast, more and more neighborhood-based constituencies started forming their own
CDCs, partly taking control back from outsiders (Yin, 1998). And while CDCs tried their hand
at a wide variety of community development activities, most of them found that what they
were best at was housing development (von Hoffman, 2013). But over time economies of scale
cought up with them, and into the 1990s and beyond there was a wave of CDC downsizings,
failures, and mergers that diluted grass-roots control over neighborhood development (Rohe
et al., 2003).

This model is pretty unique to the U.S. So yet another way to think about the variations
in practice is to consider one of the forms that U.S. exceptionalism takes – the splitting of
community organizing and CD into separate practices and even separate organizations. In
much of the world, organizing and development are combined (Kenny, 2002), and sometimes the term social development is applied to it (Binswanger-Mkhize et al., 2010). But in the U.S. the practices are usually split. Community organizing developed a culture of confrontation and opposition in the U.S., while community development grew to mostly refer to physical development, especially in the arena of housing (von Hoffman, 2013). This is, of course, partly due to the other form of U.S. exceptionalism – the anti-government culture and glorified unfettered capitalism that characterizes the country (Lipset, 1996). The few attempts to recombine organizing and development have been sporadic and short-lived (Greenberg, 2005; Stoecker, 2003b).

In the rest of the global north, and including the settler colonies of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand imposed by Britain in the seventeenth–nineteenth centuries, government is not as suspect, the government-sponsored safety net is stronger, and community organizing is less confrontational and oppositional (see for example, Community Organisers, 2020). In addition, stronger welfare states provide for more citizen needs (van Kersbergen and Vis, 2013) reducing the need for a strong non-profit sector for things like housing development. But devolution and austerity have in recent decades created a need for more U.S.-style community organizing in places with previously strong welfare states (Harries et al., 2020; Hande and Kelly, 2015; Bailey et al., 2017). In recent years, this has resulted in CD around immigrant, refugee, and Roma communities increasing in prominence (Ryder et al., 2014; Kirwan and Jacob, 2016).

Global South Community Development

In the global south, however, CD continues to operate in the tension between large outside forces and community-based efforts. The largest and least accountable outside forces, of course, exist in the form of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. There are also massively large non-governmental development organizations like Oxfam that operate in communities across the global south with grass-roots groups. National development efforts are also often designed in country capitals in order to promote the incursion of capitalism into rural and indigenous communities in order to make them “civilized” or “correct.” How much community control exists in such efforts can vary tremendously, though there is increasing support for stronger forms of community control. Even the World Bank promotes their research findings that show greater success with greater community control (Binswanger-Mkhize et al., 2010). It is important to note that in general the World Bank is viewed with skepticism if not explicit criticism by many in the global south, especially those who would embrace a more transformation approach to PAR and CD.

These efforts can contrast with the most home-grown efforts at CD, many of which are informed by indigenous culture. As Sillitoe (2006) describes, development that starts from indigenous knowledge allows for local definitions of both problems and strategies to prevail over outsider-imposed definitions. There are more formal local community development programs such as the barefoot doctors movement in China (Rosenthal and Greiner, 1982). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the practice of Kaupapa Maori is deeply informed by Maori culture (Mane, 2009). In this book Asturias and Salazar demonstrate this in their chapter about Cuenca, Ecuador.

One of the important characteristics of much international development is the inclusion of human rights as an integral part of CD. Indeed, much international CD focuses on power and even systems change (Kenny et al., 2018; Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001). In the global south, as
a consequence, those who focus on process, rather than just physical development have a more prominent role in CD. Even some of the historical figures associated with forms of participatory action research – Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, and others – are included in the field of CD (Ledworth, 2016; Sloman, 2012).

THE NEOLIBERAL TURN IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

One of the most important trends in CD led by the global north has been the increasing influence of neoliberalism on the field. Neoliberalism manifests itself in the elimination of both government regulation over economic actors and government services for those harmed by such economic actors. Philosophically, neoliberalism replaces values about collective action and the community good with values about individualistic achievement and responsibility, and human values with economic values. At the government level, this means dismantling the welfare state (Hartman, 2005; Hasenfeld and Garrow, 2012) and imposing austerity measures (Conway, 2014), restricting various forms of protest and collective action, including union organizing (Blum, 2019; Peters, 2011), and dramatically scaling back environmental and health protections (Castree, 2010). In CD, neoliberalism replaces collective forms of development such as cooperative housing, worker and consumer cooperatives, and community agriculture with new practices emphasizing collective impact, community capitals, asset-based CD (ABCD), resilience, social entrepreneurship, and capacity building. Here we expand on Stoecker and Witkovsky’s (2020) discussion of these neoliberal influences over CD.

Collective impact may seem to be the CD approach least influenced by neoliberalism, as it usually involves both government and non-profit agencies in coordinating efforts around ameliorating social problems (Kania and Kramer, 2011). Indeed, the critiques of collective impact often come from those who see the model as privileging professionals in devising and implementing solutions, and excluding constituency groups from the process (Christens and Inzeo, 2015). Looking at the neoliberal influences on collective impact, however, Christens and Inzeo (2015) also see the practice as avoiding any analysis of root problems or challenging existing power structures, and adopting a form of neoliberal managerialism that can legitimize cuts in government services.

The community capitals approach (Flora et al., 2016) adds cultural, human, political, economic, financial, and environmental capitals to the social capital model and turns them into exchangeable commodities. But most important and problematic is social capital, which begins by thinking about social networks as literally a form of “capital” that can be invested for either individual gain (Fukuyama, 1999) or, in our case, community improvement. In particular this model advocates that, to achieve such goals, communities should switch from emphasizing “bonding capital” – close relationships of trust within a community – to “bridging” or “linking” social capital that can connect the community to external actors with access to resources (Putnam, 2000). Thus it takes human relationships and transforms them from what Marx would call “use values” – things that are valued in and of themselves – to “exchange values” – things whose value is determined by exchange in a market setting. In addition, it requires communities to frame themselves in such a way as to appear attractive to such outsiders, limiting their development options (DeFilippis, 2001; Van den Berk-Clark and Pyles, 2012; Stoecker, 2004). The other community capitals then become similarly transformed.
The association of ABCD with neoliberalism is controversial (Roy, 2017). The approach initially develops as Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) critique the social welfare approach to poverty alleviation, arguing that the social welfare approach sees marginalized people as needy and deficient and thus needing help from professionals. Kretzmann and McKnight then argue that we should see people in poverty, and their communities, as having assets or “gifts” instead. But such an analysis can show a neoliberal bias in two ways. First, charging that social welfare approaches portray people in poverty as somehow deficient is not only inaccurate but distracts us from the structural argument that the fault lies not in the individuals but in a system that puts up barriers to success. Second, ABCD’s solution is for those individuals to deploy their assets to do their own development, again distracting us from structural analysis that could illuminate the systemic barriers to doing so and replacing it with a neoliberal ideology of individualization and privatization (MacLeod and Emejulu, 2014). Thus, people’s failure to develop their communities without outside assistance could lead to a form of neoliberal victim blaming (Stoecker, 2004).

Resilience is a close relative of ABCD, even replacing sustainability as a standard among some CD practitioners (Axel-Lute, 2019). The focus of resilience has individualistic underpinnings, promoting strategies for how individuals can be resilient, but then expanding the idea to communities. The concept of resilience itself emphasizes individual responsibility for coping with the uncertainties and disruptions that are endemic to a deregulated capitalist economy devoid of significant safety nets, along with climate chaos and the increasing global challenges that seem to surround us (Joseph, 2013; Tierney, 2015). Thus, like ABCD, it places responsibility on the individual, or individual communities to fend for themselves, avoiding any analysis of the social structural roots of the threats all around.

Social entrepreneurship is the most clearly neoliberal form of CD. It takes the idea of the self-made person to the extreme, showing that it is not only possible to take responsibility for one’s own fate, but then help others at the same time. The concept is deeply hegemonic, emphasizing the social good of the social entrepreneur, and distracting us away from how the social entrepreneur also could exploit wage workers (Lazzarato, 2009). It is to these individual social entrepreneurs that we now turn for housing development, job development, token environmental protection, and social services (Hamschmid and Pirson, 2011). This model is promoted across the globe (Mayer and Rankin, 2002) and another indicator of the hegemony involved is the lengths to which authoritarian governments in developing countries will go to create support structures for a select chosen subset of the supposedly hyper-individualistic social entrepreneurs (Kreitmeyr, 2019).

Finally, capacity building then becomes the focus for technical assistance to CD organizations. And given the increasing dominance of neoliberal-influenced models such as collective impact, community capitals, ABCD, resilience, and social entrepreneurship, capacity building becomes training in neoliberalism. Additionally, within neoliberalism, CDCs and other such organizations must operate like businesses, putting the economic bottom line before the human and environmental bottom line. As CD organizations “professionalize,” the technical financial aspects of development take precedence, CDCs become more easily controlled by funders (Thibault, 2007) and embedded in the non-profit industrial complex (INCITE!, 2007), and they become more removed from their constituencies (Stoecker, 1997).

Within the neoliberal context, we are consequently seeing important shifts in on-the-ground practice of CD. Instead of CDCs producing housing, community development financial institutions are now supporting social entrepreneurs who are acting as developers (Doshna,
 Farmers’ markets, branded as the apex of direct-to-consumer community agriculture, are also physical manifestations of the pure neoliberal market unfettered by collective controls, excluding those who cannot pay the often higher prices of such a neoliberal market setting (Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco, 2014).

MOVING TOWARD PROGRESSIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

These trends show a CD practice unreflectively driven more by neoliberal ideology than knowledge about the structural conditions affecting marginalized communities. Neoliberal CD models are glorifying the isolated individual, or the isolated individual community, over the reality that we are all connected and need to organize collectively if we are to develop strong, sustainable communities that build into strong, sustainable societies.

Good CD practice needs to be guided by deep knowledge – of social structures and power relations, of forms of collective action, of policy options, and of criteria for social, environmental, and other forms of sustainability.

As CD becomes more technical, driven by exclusionary technical knowledge and led by professionals, it risks becoming even more of a colonizing practice propping up capitalism rather than empowering people. And in a more complicated world, the kinds of development that CD can accomplish require even more access to information and knowledge. In order to roll back the neoliberalization of CD and return the practice to the people’s control, we need to expand and integrate the practice of PAR because the people will only be able to control their own development when they have access to the means of knowledge production that can build their power and inform community development practice. This collection attempts to inform that goal.

ABOUT THIS COLLECTION

We are very proud of all the contributions to this book. Our authors gathered together with us to talk about their work in a virtual meeting, gave each other feedback on their drafts in a peer-review process, wrote and revised their chapters multiple times, and worked tirelessly to help us through all the details in the final stretches of submitting the manuscript. We express our deepest appreciation to the authors for their work in the world and on this collection.

Though a plurality of chapters in this collection come from the global north, reflecting inequalities in the global political economic and higher education system, we also have chapters from work being done on five continents. These chapters represent the commitment of our authors to writing through a global pandemic, sometimes as their own projects were impacted by that pandemic. Some of them explore the challenges of integrating PAR and CD while navigating the baggage of colonization. Others explore how jettisoning the baggage of colonization allows for new innovations in PAR/CD. The chapters range incredibly widely across varying PAR methods and varying CD approaches. Our grouping of the chapters is thus probably arbitrary. But they help us at least to feel some coherence in the volume. You will see that the early chapters mostly review institutionalized PAR/CD in the global north, and then gradually transition to the global south, with the final chapters presenting what we think are the
most provocative perspectives on PAR/CD practice. But no chapter is only about the topic it’s listed under. So if you are interested in urban development, for example, you will find chapters across the parts. Nevertheless, here is the organization we have chosen.

Part I, Structures and processes for integrating participatory action research and community development, looks at some of the infrastructure we can create in order to bring the two practices together. Megan Brown, Jack Dougherty, and Jeff Partridge explore the Liberal Arts Action Lab – a unique partnership between a liberal arts college and a community college in the northeastern U.S. that has committed to community-driven processes and supported community groups to achieve real community development outcomes. Randy Stoecker, Todd Barr, and Mark Skinner then discuss an almost singularly unique model of integrating PAR and CD managed by three community-based non-profit organizations in Ontario, Canada that connect university research resources with community groups to advance their community development goals. Jenice Meyer and Katelyn Baumann look at how university, local government, education, and non-profit actors came together to facilitate a community-based visioning project in a small northern U.S. city. Manuel Martínez Casanova and Adrienne Falcón develop a theory based on work at the University of Santa Clara, Cuba that focuses on social development of communities as “protagonists” in society.

Part II, Organizing communities, focuses on PAR/CD projects that emphasize building people’s power and capacity. Dadit Hidayat and Molly Schwebach compare one project organizing a white community around environmental sustainability with another organizing Black men returning from prison around urban agriculture in the northern U.S., showing how PAR supported these two very different projects in perhaps surprisingly similar ways. Lucie Gélineau et al. explore PAR/CD projects facilitated by community organizers who themselves were supported through a community of practice to do PAR in Québec, Canada. Finally, Nicole Breazeale et al. look at how story telling as a form of PAR, in a rural community college where the students were members of the communities with whom they were collaborating, supports community organizing and social change in the southern U.S.

Part III, Building organizations and neighborhoods, discusses the integration of PAR and CD in relation to community and organization capacity building. Maxwell Droznin and colleagues tell a fascinating story of a university–community PAR/CD relationship in the southern U.S. that gradually transformed from being university-led to being community-led. Laura O’Toole, Nancy Gordon, and Jessica Walsh exhibit how PAR can be used for organizational development in a neighborhood-based community organization in the northeastern U.S. Farrah Jacquez et al. describe how a neighborhood-based organization came together in the northern U.S. to guide early childhood education efforts, and its use of participatory evaluation as part of its organizational development. Larry Stillman et al. then explore the challenges involved in bringing together universities, non-governmental organizations, and local community groups to facilitate a Bangladesh community informatics project to support women-led commerce using mobile phones and project-based PAR.

Part IV, Growing youth power, includes perspectives on the practice of YPAR. M. Alex Wagaman et al. discuss the integration of YPAR and CD around a youth homelessness community education and advocacy effort led by young people experiencing homelessness in the U.S. Danielle Stevens, Tetiana Kidruk, and Oleh Petrus analyze a Ukraine YPAR project to enhance youth volunteering that ended up turning into a youth leadership development project. Kathryn Morgan, Brian Christens, and Melody Gibson explore an ambitious project in the southern U.S. combining urban design and YPAR with middle schoolers.
Part V, Responding to crisis, came together partly because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but is more about how PAR/CD projects respond to mass disruption. Ming Hu’s chapter focuses on how a coalition of community groups came together to support a community struck by the Szechuan earthquake of 2008 in China, employing an innovative PAR/CD strategy. Laura Livingston compares two PAR/CD projects, one university-led and the other community-led, that carried on through the COVID-19 epidemic in the northern U.S., with counter-intuitive findings. And Alessandra Seiter shows us how mutual aid groups that sprang up to support communities disrupted by COVID-19 innovated PAR/CD strategies.

Part VI, Expanding our thinking, includes the most provocative chapters in this collection that involve the deepest questioning of PAR/CD practice and show us community-led PAR/CD that we may otherwise not even include in the practice. Ana Elisa Astudillo and Ana Cecilia Salazar tell the story of a community collective in Cuenca, Ecuador that uses PAR in support of its Right to the City efforts. Ihsan Mejdi and Celeste Koppe tell us about a community in Tunisia that, in the wake of the revolution, reclaimed agricultural land from colonization and used it to expand human rights and community development, using community historical knowledge as its PAR support. José Wellington Sousa uses global south PAR philosophy and reflexive experience in the Amazon to rethink PAR/CD practice by focusing on relationship building as not just a path toward development but as a form of development in itself. Daniel Bryan and Chelsea Viteri then round out the collection by promoting a decolonizing PAR/CD built on stories as both knowledge and relationship, reflecting on experience in Ecuador.

Through these chapters we invite you to reconsider the relationship between CD and PAR and become involved in reflection and practice on the possibilities that emerge when these approaches are intentionally combined.

NOTES

1. Thanks to Larry Stillman for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
2. For more on critical YPAR see http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/, which provides a perspective on the field as well as tools for those seeking to launch their own YPAR projects. See also the book edited by Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine (2008), key leaders in the field of YPAR.

REFERENCES


Doshna, Jeffrey Peter. 2015. Community Development in the Age of Neoliberalism: The Case of the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative. PhD, Rutgers, State University of New Jersey. https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/47357


Introduction


